

employee notifies a clerk or the like at the shop of the transmitted instructions to make various arrangements for inventorying, as required. If the inventory employee is unsuccessful in performing operations with respect to an inventory of the object commodities referring only to images of the selling areas, the inventory employee requests a clerk at the selling areas to perform minimum operations, which the inventory employee cannot perform from a remote place, thereby surely making an inventory of the object commodity using the inventory computer 50A or 50B, or the mobile information terminal 50C.

The use of the telephone line 60 as a communication means allows a part-time employee to inventory the object commodities. For example, a company which intends to inventory object commodities requests the part-time employee to inventory (count) the object commodities over the telephone. After that, the part-time employee connects the inventory computer 50A, or a terminal (such as a mobile information telephone) which serves to function as the mobile information terminal 50C, to the control computer 10A installed at the shop via the telephone line 60 to obtain images of a selling area where the object commodities to be inventoried are placed. The part-time employee makes an inventory of the object commodities with

reference to the obtained images of the selling area. Since part-time employees that can perform inventory taking are easily found and hired, it is possible to eliminate the need for employees of the company and clerks at the shops to work as inventory employees, thereby greatly reducing the cost of inventorying the object commodities.

If the company owns a multiple of chain shops located worldwide, the company installs the inventory computer 50A at a remote place in a different time zone where some of the shops are located and hires employees or part-time employee, who live in the remote place, as inventory employees. This enables the employees or the part-time employees at the remote place to inventory the object commodities while it is night in the time zone in which the stores are located, and it is day in the remote place where the inventory computer 50A is located. One advantage is that inventory taking performed during the daytime is less costly than inventorying performed during nighttime. A further advantage is that it is possible to hire inventory employees in areas or countries where labor costs are.

(A-4) Configuration of the camera section:

The TV camera 20A and the camera positioning device 21A, which are installed in a shop in the

tele-inventory system 100, will now be described with reference to FIGS. 4A and 4B. FIGS. 4A and 4B are perspective views respectively showing a camera section of the tele-inventory system 100.

5 In FIG. 4A, the TV camera 20A capable of zooming in/out on an object of which an image is to be taken is mounted on a pan/tilt mount 21a of the camera positioning device 21A. The pan/tilt mount 21a is controlled by the camera controller 13A and the motor driver 15a in such a manner that the position and the posture of the TV camera 20A that takes an image of a selling area is remotely controlled.

10 The zoom-in/out operations of the TV camera 20A are directly controlled by the camera controller 13A, as mentioned above. A security camera previously installed in the shop may also serve as the TV camera 20A, which is used as shown in FIG. 4A. Conversely, the TV camera 20A that is installed for the tele-inventory system 100 may be also used as a security camera.

15 In the example of FIG. 4B, the camera positioning device 21A is composed of linear-motion rails (axial of screws) 22a, 22b, 22c and sliding (nut) members 23a, 23b, 23c, which elements are fixed to the commodity shelf 80.

25 The linear-motion rails 22a and 22b are fixed respectively along the top and bottom horizontal